United Nations A/71/811

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 February 2017

Original: English

Seventy-first session
Agenda item 134
Programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017

Revised estimates for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic related to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the revised estimates for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic related to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 (A/71/761). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information, concluding with written responses received on 8 February 2017.

2. In its resolution 2165 (2014), the Security Council initially decided to establish (for a period of 180 days) a mechanism to monitor, with the consent of the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic, the loading of all humanitarian relief consignments of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners at the relevant United Nations facilities. The mechanism would also monitor any subsequent opening of the consignments by the customs authorities of the relevant neighbouring countries at certain border crossings with Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, with notification to the Syrian authorities, in order to confirm the humanitarian nature of the relief consignments.[1] The Council subsequently extended the mandate of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism in resolutions 2191 (2014) of 17 December 2014 and 2258 (2015) of 22 December 2015 and, most recently, in resolution 2332 (2016) of 21 December 2016, in which the Council extended the mandate until 10 January 2018.

3. The proposed revised estimates cover the period from 11 January to 31 December 2017 for a total amount of $3,890,000 net ($4,221,300 gross). Taking into account the unencumbered balance of $1,173,600 net ($1,252,600 gross)

[1] The border crossings with the Syrian Arab Republic are: Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa (border with Turkey), Al-Ramtha (border with Jordan) and Al Yarubiyah (border with Iraq). The Al Yarubiyah border crossing is not currently monitored owing to the security situation in Iraq.

Please recycle

against the approved resources in the amount of $4,414,000 for the Mechanism for the period from 1 January 2016 to 10 January 2017, the Secretary-General is requesting additional requirements under the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 in the amount of $2,716,400 net under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, and $252,300 under section 36, Staff assessment, to be offset by a corresponding amount under income section 1 Income from staff assessment, for a total of $2,968,700 gross. The total revised estimate for the biennium 2016-2017 amounts to $7,130,400 net ($7,731,900 gross), while the revised appropriation for the period from 1 January 2016 to 10 January 2017 would amount to $4,414,000 net ($4,763,200 gross). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that there was a variance of $90,400 between this figure and the appropriation approved by the General Assembly[2] of $4,323,600 (net of staff assessment), which is related to recosting during 2016.

Mandate implementation

4. The Secretary-General has indicated that cross-border operations have steadily increased since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) and that, as at 31 December 2016, a total of 467 shipments or 12,093 trucks had crossed the border into the Syrian Arab Republic[3] since July 2014. The Secretary-General has also indicated that the Monitoring Mechanism has successfully monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of all consignments without incident or complaints from any party. With respect to the role of the Monitoring Mechanism vis-à-vis the increased number of agencies that are delivering aid, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the Mechanism helps to ensure the transparency of cross-border operations and to alleviate the concerns of the parties regarding the use of aid convoys for other than humanitarian purposes. In addition, a study on lessons learned concluded in 2015 that the Mechanism has been instrumental in increasing collaboration, such as enhanced information sharing, between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, on cross-border assistance from Jordan and Turkey.

Relocation of the Office of the Chief of the Monitoring Mechanism

5. The plans to relocate the Office of the Chief of the Monitoring Mechanism from Amman to Gaziantep (Turkey) in April 2017 are laid out in the report of the Secretary-General. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the relocation is aimed at ensuring more effective and efficient management and at bringing the Office closer to the centre of operations, since 80 per cent of United Nations cross-border assistance for the Syrian Arab Republic is coordinated at Gaziantep, which is one of the three humanitarian coordination hubs under the Whole-of-Syria coordination system. Furthermore, the municipality benefits from a modern infrastructure, including telecommunications and air transport connections. The Committee was also informed that savings on rental fees are expected, since it is expected that the unused portion of the current office in Amman[4] would be relinquished, with any changes in requirements to be reported within the context of the second performance report of the Secretary-General for the biennium 2016-2017. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the initiative to relocate the Office of the Chief closer to the current operations of the Mechanism. Furthermore, the Committee looks forward to the realization of savings as a result of the move.**

---

[2] See General Assembly resolution 70/248 B, sect. IV, para. 4.

[3] The Secretary-General has indicated that, since July 2014, a total of 9,701 trucks have crossed from Turkey and 2,392 trucks from Jordan.

[4] The current office in Amman is located on the premises of the United Nations Development Programme.

Staffing requirements

6. The proposed staffing complement for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for 2017 would consist of 42 general temporary assistance positions, including 1 D-1, 1 P-5, 4 P-4, 5 P-3, 3 P-2, 5 National Professional Officers, 14 Local level and 9 United Nations Volunteers, representing a net decrease of 1 position compared with 2016. The staffing requirements reflect (a) the relocation of the Chief of Office (D-1), one Administrative Officer (P-3) and one Special Assistant to the Chief (P-2) from Amman to Gaziantep; (b) the establishment of one position of Monitoring Officer (P-3) and one position of Driver (Local level) in Gaziantep; and (c) the abolishment of one position of Team Leader (P-5) in Gaziantep and one position of Executive Assistant (Local level) in Amman (see A/71/761, para. 11-14). The Advisory Committee was informed that, for the above-mentioned 42 positions, an amount of $3,068,900 would provide for salaries ($2,228,500), common staff costs ($818,800) and overtime ($21,600).

7. With respect to the proposed establishment of the position of Monitoring Officer (P-3) in Gaziantep, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that following the proposed abolishment of the position of Team Leader (P-5), related functions would be assumed by the incumbent of the existing Monitoring Officer (P-4) position, with the incumbent of the proposed Monitoring Officer (P-3) position to act as deputy team leader, when required.

8. The Secretary-General has indicated that, as at 31 December 2016, 31 positions were encumbered, representing an overall vacancy rate of 28 per cent. Of the 12 vacant positions, 8 are to be based in Iraq, where the prevailing security situation has prevented the commencement of United Nations cross-border operations (A/71/761, para. 11). In this connection, however, the Advisory Committee was informed that the proposed resource requirements for the period from 11 January to 31 December 2017 are based on a vacancy rate of 10 per cent for continuing international positions, of 50 per cent for new international positions and of 15 per cent for United Nations Volunteers, while for national positions, the following vacancy rates would be applied:

	National Professional Officer	*Local level*
Location	*(percentage)*	
Turkey	5	12
Jordan	0	0
Iraq	50	50

9. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a 10 per cent vacancy rate for continuing international positions would be applied, as it was anticipated that more staff could be recruited in 2017 and that the office in Iraq could be established. The Committee was also provided with a vacancy rate report for 2016, with the following actual average vacancy rates for that year: (a) 34.5 per cent for the Professional category for existing international positions; (b) 29.6 per cent for United Nations Volunteers; and (c) 28.3 per cent for national staff (National Professional Officers and Local level staff at all three locations).

10. **Taking into account the continuing high vacancy rates for the Monitoring Mechanism at all locations and, in particular, the difficulties in establishing an office in Iraq and commencing related cross-border operations, the Advisory Committee is of the view that vacancy rates for the period from 11 January to 31 December 2017 should reflect operational realities. The Committee therefore**

recommends to the General Assembly the application of uniform average vacancy factors, based on current 2016 average vacancy rates, for all locations for 2017, as follows (a) 35 per cent for the Professional category for existing international positions; (b) 30 per cent for United Nations Volunteers; and (c) 30 per cent for national staff (National Professional Officers and Local level staff at all three locations). The Committee further recommends that related non-post requirements be adjusted accordingly.

Non-staffing requirements

11. The Advisory Committee was informed that the main non-staffing requirements pertaining to the additional requirements relate to:

(a) General operating expenses ($337,100) for the rental of premises in Turkey, Jordan and Iraq ($260,400); communications, including local and long-distance phone calls and satellite phone subscriptions ($27,900); maintenance for 10 vehicles ($21,400); freight and related costs for commercial freight of purchased equipment and shipments of items between the offices of the Monitoring Mechanism ($3,000); and general insurance for 10 vehicles and for the registration of three vehicles in Jordan pursuant to local Ministry of Transportation requirements ($24,400);

(b) Travel of staff ($297,800) including travel between the offices of Amman, Gaziantep and Dohuk, Iraq, for administrative support, meetings support during peak periods and travel of the Chief to meetings in New York, Geneva, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Lebanon ($98,200); local travel ($186,700), including for the daily subsistence allowance of Monitoring Officers and Drivers for travel to the borders for trips longer than 10 hours or for overnight trips; and travel related to training ($12,900);

(c) Grants and contributions ($61,900) for the cost-sharing contribution of the Monitoring Mechanism to the Department of Safety and Security for radio room operations ($8,600); remote mission support provided by the Service for Geospatial, Information and Telecommunications Technologies ($24,800); and United Nations Development Programme support costs for recruitment and elements of administration of staff, issuance of identification cards, requests for visas and vehicle registration and other administrative procedures ($28,500);

(d) Furniture and equipment ($51,000) for the acquisition of furniture ($9,900); communication and network equipment ($16,800); office equipment ($2,900); software licences ($6,400); and safety and security equipment ($15,000), this amount being inclusive of resources for furniture and equipment for the establishment of an office in Dohuk as soon as the security situation allows ($23,900).

Travel of staff

12. With respect to the travel of staff, the proposed requirements in the amount of $297,800 would remain unchanged for the period from 11 January to 31 December 2017, as compared with the period from 1 January 2016 to 10 January 2017. The Advisory Committee notes that the previous period was slightly longer than the current 2017 period and was informed, upon enquiry, that the requirements for staff travel have been calculated taking into consideration actual expenditures for 2016 and that it has been assumed that United Nations agencies and partners would maintain operations at the same level as in 2016. In this connection, the Committee was provided with a breakdown of international travel for 2016, which showed, however, that in the majority of cases, the requirement for making travel

arrangements 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of official travel had not been met. The Committee was also informed that the relocation of the Office of the Chief from Amman to Gaziantep would limit the risk of last-minute travel, since the largest part of the cross-border operation is being coordinated at that location, thereby reducing the risk of contingencies that would involve last-minute travel. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that the Monitoring Mechanism is now planning to hold two, instead of the three staff retreats initially planned in 2017 (see para. 14 below), thereby reducing related travel costs. **In view of the aforementioned instances of likely savings, the Advisory Committee recommends to the General Assembly a reduction of the requirements under the travel of staff by $14,890 (or 5 per cent).**

Furniture and equipment

13. With respect to the provision of furniture and equipment for the office in Iraq, the Advisory Committee notes that the Monitoring Mechanism has not been able to establish an office at that location owing to the security situation (see also paras. 9-10 above). **The Advisory Committee therefore considers that the requirements for furniture and equipment for the office in Iraq should be presented at the appropriate time and recommends at this time against approval of the proposed related requirements in the amount of $23,900.**

Contractual services

14. The Advisory Committee was informed that the total amount of $18,600 for contractual services is inclusive of costs related to two team-building retreats and one management retreat. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that it was now planned to conduct only two retreats, namely, one team-building retreat in March 2017 and one management retreat in Istanbul in June 2017. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to undertake a full cost comparison prior to deciding on the location(s) of office retreats. In this connection, the Committee reiterates its view that existing United Nations system facilities should be used for such activities.**

Timing and submission of revised estimates

15. The Advisory Committee notes once again that, following the extension of the mandate of the Monitoring Mechanism, the revised estimates-related proposals were issued two weeks after the commencement of the new mandate period. The Committee recalls that, upon extension of the previous mandate, the revised estimates were also issued a short time (one month) into the new mandate period. In this connection, the Committee has previously cited the example of the mandates of the special political missions: while they have different renewal dates, their budgets are presented for a full 12 months on the assumption that they will be renewed by the Security Council (A/70/7/Add.46, para. 13).

16. **The Advisory Committee points out that the mandate of the Monitoring Mechanism, established in 2014, has already been renewed twice and emphasizes that another yearly renewal, at the end of the year 2017, may be anticipated. The Committee expects that relevant resource estimates will therefore be included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019. In this connection, the Committee also recalls paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 62/236, in which the Assembly noted with concern the piecemeal approach to the budget process and requested the Secretary-General, for all future proposed programme budgets, to take the necessary steps to avoid such a piecemeal approach to the budget process and ensure the**

fullest possible picture of the Organization's requirements for future bienniums (see also A/70/7/Add.46,[5] para. 14).

Conclusion

17. **Subject to its comments above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) Approve the additional resources for the period from 11 January to 31 December 2017 in the amount of $3,202,800 (net of staff assessment);

(b) Appropriate an additional amount of $2,029,200 (net of staff assessment) under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, of the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017, as well as an additional amount of $172,300 under section 36, Staff assessment, to be offset by an equivalent amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment, for the biennium 2016-2017. The amount of $2,029,200 would represent a charge against the contingency fund for the biennium 2016-2017.

[5] The General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Committee (A/70/7/Add.46) in sect. IV, para. 2, of its resolution 70/248 B.